



DROMICIA GLIRIFORMIS.

J. Gould and H.C. Richter del. & lith.

Ballou sculp. S. Wilson imp.

DROMICIA GLIRIFORMIS.

Thick-tailed Dromicia.

Phalangista gliriformis, Bell in Linn. Trans., vol. xvi. p. 121. pl. 13.

Dromicia gliriformis, List of Mamm. in Brit. Mus. Coll., p. 85.

THE *Dromicia gliriformis* is nowhere more abundant than in Van Diemen's Land, particularly the northern parts of the island; and indeed it is very questionable if it is to be found in any other part of Australia; but our present knowledge will not admit of the positive assertion.

I am sufficiently acquainted with the habits and economy of the *Dromicia gliriformis* to state that it is a strictly nocturnal animal, and that of all trees it prefers the Banksias, whose numerous blossoms supply it with a never-ceasing store of food, both of insects and sweets; if I mistake not, it also feeds upon the tender buds and spikes of the flowers. During the day it generally slumbers coiled up in some hollow branch or fissure in the trees, whence if its retreat be discovered it is easily taken by the hand; this state of inactivity is totally changed at night, when it runs over the smaller branches and leaps from flower to flower with the utmost ease and agility. This disposition is just as strongly displayed by it when kept in confinement; being so drowsy during the daytime as to admit of its being handled without evincing the least anxiety to escape, while the contrary is the case as soon as night approaches. I have also observed that during the months of winter it is less active than in the summer; undergoing in fact a kind of hybernation, somewhat similar, but not to the same extent, as the Dormouse.

That this interesting little animal bears confinement well and contentedly, is proved by the circumstance of the pair from which the accompanying drawing was taken being now alive in the possession of Her Most Gracious Majesty at Windsor Castle, where they are thriving as well as if they were in their native wilds. They were brought to this country by the Very Reverend the Archdeacon Marriott, who kindly permitted me to make drawings of them for the present work. If any difference is perceptible between examples in captivity and those in a state of nature, it is that the former are more sluggish in their actions and inclined to obesity.

Four individuals formed part of the collection in the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park, and after living there for three years died, apparently without disease and probably from old age; and my most estimable friend Thomas Bell, Esq., F.R.S., was in possession of living examples for four years, which furnished him with the materials for a paper on its habits and economy while in confinement, and I take the liberty of copying the following extract verbatim:—

“In their habits they are extremely like the Dormouse, feeding on nuts and other similar food, which they hold in their fore-paws, using them as hands. They are nocturnal, remaining asleep during the whole day, or, if disturbed, not easily roused to a state of activity, and coming forth late in the evening, and then assuming their natural rapid and vivacious habits; they run about a small tree which is placed in their cage, using their paws to hold by the branches, and assisting themselves by their prehensile tail, which is always held in readiness to support them, especially when in a descending attitude. Sometimes the tail is thrown in a reverse direction, turned over the back, and at other times, when the weather is cold, it is rolled closely up towards the under part and coiled almost between the thighs. When eating they sit upon their hind-quarters, holding the food in their fore-paws, which, with the face, are the only parts apparently standing out from the ball of fur of which the body seems at that time to be composed. They are perfectly harmless and tame, permitting any one to hold and caress them without ever attempting to bite, but do not evince the least attachment either to persons about them or to each other.”

Considerable diversity of colour exists in different individuals; in some the upper surface is nearly uniform grey, while in others a fine tawny or rufous tint pervades the same parts; and examples are constantly met with exhibiting every variety of intermediate shade.

The sexes are very nearly alike in size and colour.

The fur is very soft and thick; all the upper surface either grey or yellowish grey, the yellow tint predominating on the sides, body, and the face; under surface either greyish white or yellowish white; base of the tail similar in colour to the upper surface of the body, but becoming purplish flesh-colour towards the tip.

The figures are of the natural size.